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Pilot in 'Plot' Wasn't in Dallas

By CARL J. PELLECK
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New Orleans, Feb. 23—David W. Ferrie, the pilot who died mysteriously yesterday just as his arrest was imminent as an alleged conspirator in the assassination of President Kennedy, was not in Dallas the day Kennedy was shot, it was revealed today.

The disclosure came from controversial District Attorney Jim Garrison, the man pushing the runaway investigation into Kennedy's murder on Nov. 22, 1963. Garrison insists that he has evidence which the Warren Commission overlooked.

And while Garrison broke his self-imposed silence to describe Ferrie as "a man who, in my judgment, was one of history's most important individuals," he was apparently in open dispute with the Orleans parish coroner over the cause of death.

Garrison called Ferrie's death an "apparent suicide" resulting from swallowing the contents of some 25 bottles of pills.

The coroner, Dr. Nicholas Chetta, said the autopsy showed death was apparently due to a ruptured blood vessel at the base of the brain causing a fatal hemorrhage.

Garrison's suicide theory was expressed in a statement handed to reporters at a press conference in his office late yesterday. The reporters were still present when the prosecutor was handed a note by an aide advising him that the coroner had attributed Ferrie's death to a brain hemorrhage resulting from aneurism caused by "overexcitement and hypertension."

DAVID W. FERRIE

Murder Link Stressed

Both Garrison and Ghetta said the official decision as to the cause of death would come in several days following a chemical analysis of the dead pilot's vital organs.

But Garrison did not pass up the chance to show how Ferrie's death related to his investigation.

"Evidence developed by our office had long since confirmed that he was involved in events culminating in the assassination of President Kennedy," Garrison said.

Garrison refused to be more specific about the part Ferrie had played, although he said he feared "for a long period" that Ferrie might kill himself and only yesterday morning had reached the decision to arrest Ferrie "early next week."

House Was Watched

"Members of my staff have been maintaining a continual stakeout in the vicinity of Mr. Ferrie's house for a long period," Garrison said. "Information from this observation, as well as from other sources, had caused us to become increasingly concerned, as our investigation progressed, about the possibility of his killing himself.

"Because of this, in a meeting at my house this morning (Wednesday) we had reached a decision to arrest him early next week.

"Apparently we waited too long."

Garrison also said that Ferrie had "indicated to someone we had working for us on the case that he was going to kill himself." He said this information came in the last week or so.

He said he also based his evaluation of Ferrie's mental condition in the past week on reports from his agents which showed Ferrie involved in "endless pacing of the floor."

But he said the agents watching Ferrie's house went home when Ferrie turned ou his lights and obviously went to bed each night. Tuesday night the agent on duty left about 11 p.m. Garrison estimated time of death as 3 a.m.

Visited by Reporter

He said he had no knowledge that a reporter had visited Ferrie about midnight Tuesday and stayed until about 4 a.m. Wednesday.

George Lardner, a reporter for the Washington Post, said Ferrie had spoken to him during those hours and that he had appeared to be neither overexcited, nervous, nor depressed and had given no sign that he was contemplating ending his life.

But Dr. Chetta said he had found a note in the second-floor apartment which read:

"To leave this life is, for me, a sweet prospect. I find nothing in it that is desirable and on the other hand, everything that is loathsome."

Chetta said there was other

information written on the note, but refused to reveal it.

Chetta, who local reporters claim is a valuable source in most homicides, was silent yesterday until after Garrison called his press conference. Until then, nobody would even say there had been a death.

New Orleans DA investigators study notes outside home of David W. Ferrie.

Associated Press Wirephoto

Garrison had barred cameras because he felt it would "be creating a circus atmosphere." He said although Ferrie knew he was a suspect in the investigation into a conspiracy to kill President Kennedy, they respected each other.

Listed as Suspect

"He was well aware of our investigation . . . but he felt we were trying to be fair," Garrison remarked.

According to Garrison, Ferrie first came to his attention on Nov. 24, 1963, the day Oswald was killed by Jack Ruby in Dallas, when in an effort to try to find any persons in New Orleans who might have played a part in the assassination, a list of likely suspects was drawn up.

Ferrie's name came up on such a list, he said, but he could not be found until several days later when he returned from an auto trip to Galveston where he and two campanions had gone to hunt geese on Nov. 22.

Ferrie himself spoke freely about this in the days just before his death. He had given interviews to several newspapers and seemed anxious to remove himself from any part of the Garrison investigation.

He complained that when he was on the hunting trip Garrison had raided his home with a contingent of officers and seized "a substantial amount of my property." He said on their return he and his friends were questioned and "we were all thrown into jail and booked as fugitives from Texas." When they were eventually released, he said, he went to the FBI and the Secret Service and told his story voluntarily.

Garrison is quite obviously irked by the handling of the Ferrie case by the federal agents.

He justifies his own independent investigation by the fact that he told the FBI about Ferrie more than three years ago and has yet to receive a copy of their interview with Ferrie.

He says that he considered Ferrie a suspect then.

"Mr. Ferrie was one of the individuals I had in mind when I said there would be arrests shortly," Garrison explained.

He said Ferrie was arrested originally because "I thought it rather peculiar that he should be taking a trip to south Texas on the evening of the assassination when everyone in the country was watching television."

Yet Garrison admits that "Ferrie was not in Dallas at the time of the assassination."

FBI cleared New Orleans pilot, Warren aide says—Page 10.

For a Closeup of New Orleans DA Jim Garrison, see Page 35.

"We have known this for years," Garrison said.

"But this is not involved."

Garrison steadfastly refuses to say what is involved. He claims to this would be to further impede his investigation.

Earlier this week he accused the New Orleans papers of hindering his case by publishing a story revealing that the investigation was going on and charged that the disclosure had delayed the arrests of the principals in his investigation for months. He barred local newspaper reporters from his news conference on Monday.

Garrison said the other two men who had gone hunting with Ferrie were cleared of suspicion.

Ferrie had several times in interviews insisted that he had never met Lee Harvey Oswald. Reportedly both were in the same Civil Air Patrol unit locally, but Ferrie said this was untrue.

Ferrie also steadfastly maintained that he felt that Oswald did not have an accomplice in the assassination.

Garrison says he has "no reason to believe that Lee Harvey Oswald killed anybody in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963." Ferrie, 49, was born in Cleveland, lived in this area since the early 1950s, and was regarded as a crack pilot and an excellent instructor. He made his living at flying and flew regularly, except according to Garrison, in the last week or two when he was upset.

Garrison described Ferrie as intelligent, well read, and a perceptive individual who had no hair on his body. He wore a hairpiece and false eyelashes and eyebrows.

DR. NICHOLAS CHETTA